The Wright Stuff Book Review:

Structured Analytic Techniques for Intelligence Analysis, by Richards J. Heuer, Jr. and Randolph H. Pherson, CQ Press, 2011, 343 pages, $52.95

Richards Heuer and Randolph Pherson have done an outstanding job compiling what in essence could be described as the comprehensive guide for a beginner's course in Intelligence Analysis. This is a book as relevant to the military as it is to people wishing to enter the three- letter agencies. Spiral bound, the book is likely to become the basic analytical tradecraft "cookbook" for many years to come. The volume is well planned and highly approachable to the Intelligence novice. Starting with a short but well written Introduction and Overview, the book progresses into a series of logically placed chapters, each designed to introduce an essential component of the analytical process. The writing is concise and points are often presented in bulleted form. Each chapter is self-contained while simultaneously building the foundation for subsequent topics. Examples presented are very topical and particularly relevant to frictions the United States currently encounters throughout the world.   The book lacks a bibliography but provides sufficiently documented footnotes to ensure the reader's ability to reach out and find additional material.

Chapter 2, "Building Taxonomy," is where the meat of the volume begins. Taxonomy is particularly important because it is at this point that we set the stage for failure in the Intelligence process. Currently, in the Intelligence Community (IC), collection overwhelms analysis continually. Since the flood of information is endless, much of what is gathered is never categorized, much less even approached for analysis. Chances are, many of the smoking guns we are supposed to be looking for are already there. The material we do have must be better organized before it can be prioritized to the point we can comprehend the things we need to look at next. Quoting the somewhat controversial author Rob Johnson, the authors remind us that a "...taxonomy differentiates domains by specifying the scope of inquiry, codifying naming conventions, identifying areas of interest, helping to set research priorities, and often leading to new theories. Taxonomies are signposts, indicating what is known and what has yet to be discovered."[1]   As simple as this might sound, it is in fact quite complex,

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[1] Rob Johnston, Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005). Quoted in: Richards J. Heuer, Jr. and Randolph H. Pherson, *Structured Analytic Techniques for Intelligence Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2011), 19-20.

particularly when trying to breach the many interagency hurdles. Things are getting better, but we still need to do more. The bottom line is that all need to know (and agree) what a duck is, how it looks and sounds, where it is found, and how it behaves, if we are all to become more successful hunters.

One of the longest chapters in the book is Chapter 4, "Decomposition and Visualization." This is not surprising, since so much effort has been put into development of visualization technology. The human mind is only able to comprehend a limited range of complexity that is presented in verbal or written form. Visualization helps immensely when simultaneously dealing with more than a few dozen entities. The chapter begins with two checklists, including a "Getting Started Checklist" (pg 45) and a "Customer Checklist." Analysts should act more like pilots in their approach to methodical practice and these two sections serve as good examples, which can be customized to the localized customer's needs. (For years, I have used analytical checklists, which even today I keep in my handy Flight Crew Checklists Binder.) Both checklists offered are essential to approaching a problem set in a logical and efficient manner. Before starting any analysis, it may sound overly simplistic to ask a question such as, "What is the key intelligence question that needs to be answered?" (pg. 45), but it is not. Far too much time is still wasted gathering the wrong information or compiling it into a format unsuitable to the customer.

Who is the customer? That is a very important question. Don't believe it? Look at the material being produced by the Open Source Center (CIA sponsored) and ask the question, "What relevance does it have to the needs of a Wing Commander, or Air Force, or DoD?" The answer is that it probably doesn't have much, if any, which is unfortunate considering the monies expended gathering and compiling the information. In this era of overly strained budgets, it is essential that analysts know both who their customers are and clearly understand their needs. This is particularly important in current and future endeavors designed to improve data sharing. Each agency specializes in something from slightly to very different. All have to produce products that suit their own customers but also will be useful to All-Source Analysts located in other commands or agencies. In other words, we have to learn to talk each other's language. As stated earlier, we are doing things better, but we still have a long way to go. One simple step might be to standardize checklists, in a format similar to those presented in this book. If nothing else, all would start on the same page and could then move forward on the problem of taxonomy.

Chapter 11, "Decision Support" includes an important section on managing complexity. This is a huge problem that must be addressed by analysts almost every minute of the day. The section begins with a series of bulleted observations describing how the IC has typically dealt with complexity, but then offers an eight-point alternative method. Again, the method can be used to develop a checklist, which, when placed into practice, will provide a more robust approach than has often been used in the past.   The chapter also includes a decision matrix methodology, which is particularly useful when time can be spent to retrospectively evaluate past choices.

Bottom line – the book is a keeper and in many ways long overdue. It should be on the shelf of every analyst, whether military or civilian, experienced or novice. It is also a useful book for decision makers to better understand the process of analysis, training them to ask the most relevant questions. More educated decision makers and better-trained analysts are bound to lead to better insight, with fewer errors. This book is a good place to start the process and will hopefully be followed by more in depth volumes by the authors.

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